

Decision

adopting the opinion on the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the Structural Reform Support Programme for the period 2017 to 2020 and amending Regulations (EU) No 1303/2013 and (EU) No 1305/2013 COM(2015) 701

Under Articles 67 and 148 of the Romanian Constitution, republished, Law No 373/2013 on cooperation between Parliament and the Government in the area of European affairs, and Articles 160 to 185 of the Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies, republished,

The Chamber of Deputies has adopted this Decision.

Sole Article - Having regard to Opinion No 4c-19/187 adopted by the Committee for European Affairs at its sitting of 1 March 2016,

1. We take note that the Proposal for a Regulation is part of the European Semester package, launched in November 2015, and it was drawn up in the context of the European Commission's presenting the Annual Growth Survey 2016.

2. We agree with the Commission's assessment that structural reforms require efficient implementation, and that some public administrations do not have the capacity to achieve this objective, and this requires the creation of a sound regulatory and institutional environment that would facilitate the smooth functioning of the economy.

3. We note that the Structural Reform Support Programme is designed to provide assistance for the authorities of the Member States, for measures aimed at institutional reform, governance, and administration.

4. We take note that the proposed Programme is intended to add value and complement the already confirmed results of the current support measures, focusing on assistance for the national authorities of the Member States requesting it, especially in respect of advice and expertise on the ground, throughout the reform process or according to defined stages or to different phases of this process.

5. We welcome the focus on reforms in the Country Specific Recommendations under the European Semester, especially because gaps are permanently measured. We consider that the very complexity and depth of the tasks arising from the recommendations could be an eligibility criterion for granting the funding, which would be very fair given that the states with most difficulties would have priority.

6. We note that the main actions envisaged include reinforcing administrative capacity and best practices, through measures that are concrete and useful, but small scale and low cost, such as: seminars, conferences and workshops, working visits, studies, research, analyses and surveys, evaluations and impact assessments, drawing up, implementing and evaluating projects, strengthening IT capacity, expertise relating to policy advice, changes in policies, legislative, institutional, structural and/or administrative reforms and providing (resident) experts, organising operational support on the ground in areas such as asylum, migration and border control.

7. We note that the Commission's initiative is based on the assumption that support can be provided more efficiently by redirecting existing funds to the new Programme, instead of better using the existing funds as currently intended. We would point out that this approach contradicts the principle that no new mechanisms should be created before optimising the functioning of the existing ones.

8. We take note that the Programme does not imply additional funding from the budget of the European Union, but only a redistribution of funds. Thus, the budgetary ceiling has been set at EUR 142 800 000 for the period 2017 to 2020, which would be deducted from existing budgets, as follows: EUR 122 233 000 from technical support resources available under the Structural Funds in general, and EUR 30 567 000 from technical support resources available under the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

9. We take note that the working document drawn up by the Commission services (SWD(2014) 750), accompanying the Proposal for a Regulation, mentions that the total amount is broken down by year as follows: year 2017 - EUR 23 625 000, year 2018 - EUR 32 025 000, year 2019 - EUR 40 425 000, and year 2020 - EUR 46 725 000. We find that the amount allocated for the first year of implementation is not even EUR 1 000 000 for each Member State of the EU, while the number of measures eligible for funding is very large. This could discourage the Member States from submitting applications, and it would affect the launch of the Programme. We point out that the large number of measures eligible for funding raises doubts as to the sufficiency of the total amount allocated to the Programme.

10. We consider that the mechanism whereby the Commission decides on allocations is not well defined, and that the criteria for the emergency, reach and depth of the difficulties identified by the Member States concerned require clarifications. We consider that the imprecise definition of such criteria may cause some of the Member States to give up on submitting applications, because they would regard this as an inefficient activity.

11. We note that the Programme is designed to help the Member States that need support in the area of administrative capacity and economic governance. This, and the fact that one of the main arguments underpinning the initiative is the success of the support group and the task force for Greece and Cyprus, may lead to reserves in submitting an application to participate, in the case of Member States that do not regard themselves as having such difficulties.

12. We consider that one of the evaluation factors for the Programme's contribution to achieving the declared objectives is the percentage by which existing resources would be supplemented in respect of reinforcing administrative capacity through technical support available under other EU funding programmes, and that the interim evaluation report to be submitted by the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council by mid-2019 should include this information.

13. We consider that, if the concept underlying the initiative is accepted as valid, the general objective, the specific objectives, and the measures eligible for funding are acceptable.

14. We consider that funding the measures concerned under the Programme has added value and complies with the principle of subsidiarity only if the concept proposed by the Commission is accepted as valid. We acknowledge, subject to the concerns expressed above, the validity and sufficiency of the argument regarding the utility of the initiative in the light of the criterion of the insufficiency of national action, and accept the Commission's arguments regarding the need for action at EU level, given that this way the objectives of the EU action

can be better achieved than by national action by each Member State. We consider that, although it is not possible to determine the Programme's actual added value before it becomes operational, the proposed measures can contribute to increasing the administrative capacity of the authorities with specific tasks in implementing structural reforms, and therefore the Proposal for a Regulation can be regarded as being in compliance with the principle of subsidiarity.

15. We find that the Romanian authorities can be classified in the category of authorities facing difficulties, as identified by the European Court of Auditors, in respect of the three main weaknesses resulting in major deficiencies in implementing policies and reforms in certain areas:

(a) difficulties faced by the competent authorities in specific areas in translating reform objectives into action plans;

(b) failure of the competent authorities to adopt relevant implementing instruments to achieve the objectives;

(c) a legalistic and formalistic approach to implementing EU rules, with limited impact on the objectives pursued.

16. We consider that Romania should take part in the Programme, given that the Romanian administration, both at the national and at the local levels, still faces many funding, organisational and operational difficulties. At the same time, the support under consideration also includes assistance for effective and efficient use of EU funds, which would facilitate an increase both in the absorption rate and in the efficiency of the funds used.

17. We take note that the European Investment Bank has confirmed that it would provide support for the Romanian Government to improve management and reinforce absorption of structural and investment EU funds, and achieve the structural reforms and the investments planned in the public sector, so as to reach the goals in the Partnership Agreement for 2014-2020.

This Decision was adopted by the Chamber of Deputies at its sitting of 9 March 2016, in compliance with Article 76(2) of the Romanian Constitution, republished.

Valeriu Ștefan Zgonea,
President of the Chamber of Deputies

Bucharest, 9 March 2016

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